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Chairperson: Mr. Comissário

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee

(a) International protection

Note on international protection (A/AC.96/1145)

1. **Mr. Türk** (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection), introducing the Note on international protection (A/AC.96/1145), said that protection space could only be ensured through respect for the rule of law. In order to recall the important legal foundations of international protection as well as the strong legal framework of UNHCR, the rule of law had been chosen as the theme of the Note on international protection in 2015.

2. In a context of scarce funds and noticeable asylum fatigue, preserving access to and ensuring the quality of asylum posed significant challenges. The number of people risking their lives in an attempt to reach safety had risen significantly but the infrastructure needed to host them was often missing. In response, UNHCR had offered concrete proposals on how to cope with those movements, stepped up its operational activities and supported Governments in meeting those challenges.

3. The current situation was often referred to as a "crisis" and had given rise to fears, which were reflected in restrictive border policies, often justified by security concerns or rooted in political agendas that had little to do with the presence of refugees. Those refugees who managed to reach safe territories often received no protection or were sent back. Reception and living conditions were deteriorating and such phenomena as child labour, forced marriage and labour exploitation were on the rise. Asylum seekers and refugees, including children, were often detained without any reason. On his visits to detention centres, he had discussed alternatives to current detention practices with government representatives. Although some progress had been achieved, inter alia, in implementing the Global Strategy - Beyond Detention 2014-2019, much more needed to be done.

4. Furthermore, he stressed that humanitarian and protection concerns and security concerns were not mutually exclusive. Giving priority to the latter by sending refugees back, placing them in detention centres, or building walls only diverted migration flows to other routes and created a propitious environment for smuggling and trafficking. Ironically, some of the negative rhetoric was coming from countries whose own nationals had had to flee to other countries in the past. He recalled that the American Committee for Relief in the Near East had saved thousands of lives during and after the First World War when Greek refugees had had to flee to Syria, while during the Cold War, Western Europe had had to cope with huge numbers of refugees from Central and Eastern Europe. The main crisis the international community was currently facing was a crisis of the very values that had led to the drafting of the 1951 Refugee Convention in the wake of the atrocities of the Second World War. He called on the international community to go beyond divisions, polarization and blame and to counter xenophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric by ensuring that solidarity and generosity became the norm rather than an exception.

5. He stressed the need to increase the efficiency of asylum systems and status determination procedures both within States and in UNHCR operations. The fact that UNHCR had received more than 245,000 applications for refugee status determination in 2014 alone meant that it would need to change its method of processing individual cases. It was currently considering how to best allocate its limited resources, while ensuring that status determination remained an integral part of the overall protection strategy. At the same time, it was exploring alternatives to individual case processing.

6. Humanitarian action must seek to preserve and expand protection space for persons of concern, while saving lives and ensuring safety. Parties to a conflict must be prevented from restricting humanitarian space according to their own interests. Humanitarian action often risked being used for other purposes, such as combating extremism or as a substitute for political action. The international community must also be clear about the scope of protection as well as its limits. In cases when communities were trapped in conflict areas, evacuation might be the only solution, as had been the case in the Central African Republic, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Such actions were often controversial but the international community must be prepared to make tough choices.

7. A proper legal and policy framework based on the specific needs of internally displaced persons was also vital. Many domestic legal regimes were based on residency and failed to address the consequences of internal displacement, especially with regard to civil documentation, access to services, property, land and housing rights, freedom of movement, and voting.

8. Collective accountability towards individual human beings must be central to efforts to preserve protection space. The UNHCR Age, Gender, Diversity (AGD) policy was very important in that regard. The policy focused on protection management and, in particular, on the individuals behind the statistics. A community-based approach to protection allowed UNHCR to link its various areas of work more effectively. For example, the 2014 AGD report indicated that a greater focus on gender had resulted in an increase in the percentage of women in leadership and management positions. UNHCR had also recently started reviewing its operational practices on gender equality, with a particular focus on updating its Five Commitments to Refugee Women. As a result of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) programming, leading to more reporting, the number of reported incidents of sexual and gender-based crimes had doubled in 44 countries. Through the Safe from the Start initiative, UNHCR had sharpened its SGBV prevention and response in emergency situations. Likewise, efforts to raise public awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities had led to a twofold increase between 2012 and 2014 in the number of operations providing tailored support to such persons.

9. UNHCR also gave priority to children and young people, many of whom spent their entire childhood as refugees. UNHCR had strengthened procedures for determining the best interest of children and had seen improvements in access to national services for children and youth at risk. Access to education was critical, as a lack thereof often led to further displacement. Unlike access to early childhood and primary education, which had improved in 2014, access to secondary education remained a critical gap. In that regard, he welcomed the Declaration made by ministers of education from around the world in Incheon in May 2015, acknowledging the right of all children on a State's territory, including refugees and internally displaced persons, to have access to education. UNHCR had also developed a youth initiative fund which supported projects initiated by young people in 15 countries.

10. Finding solutions to forced displacement was another area of vital importance. Granting the right to work in host countries or resolving statelessness could prevent further displacement. Alternatives in third countries included labour mobility schemes, opportunities for family reunification and student visas. Legal employment and livelihood opportunities should be accompanied by development programmes to ensure that they benefited refugee and host communities alike.

11. Another two areas where solutions were possible, provided that the political will and the legal framework were there, were family reunification and resettlement. Recent legislation complicating family reunification procedures undermined social and economic integration. Resettlement needs had increased by 50 per cent over the

previous three years and continued to exceed available resettlement places. Some positive developments had taken place. For example, the number of refugees resettled out of Africa over the previous three years had doubled. He welcomed the new commitments that had helped UNHCR to reach its initial goal of securing 130,000 places for Syrian refugees by 2016. He stressed the need to meet the objective of providing resettlement and other options to 10 per cent of Syrian refugees waiting to be resettled.

12. In anticipation of the first anniversary of the Campaign to End Statelessness, which UNHCR would celebrate in November 2015, he called on the international community to redouble its efforts to put an end to statelessness. Some progress had been achieved in that regard. Six States had acceded to either the 1954 Convention or the 1961 Convention, or to both, and four countries had reformed nationality laws since the start of the campaign. Some 37,100 stateless persons had acquired nationality in 2014. In the Asia and Pacific region, 44 States had agreed to support universal civil registration and had endorsed a regional action framework recognizing the vital role of birth registration in preventing statelessness. The Open Letter to End Statelessness had already been signed by over 55,000 people.

13. New risks of statelessness, however, had emerged. The adoption by Myanmar of highly controversial race and religion laws was of great concern. Likewise of great concern was the fact that 142,000 Syrian refugee children had been born in exile since 2011 and were at risk of statelessness for various reasons. UNHCR had taken a series of steps to ensure that every Syrian refugee child would be issued with a birth certificate. For example, public education, legal aid, counselling and mobile birth registration services had led to significant increases in birth registration, particularly in Jordan and Egypt.

14. In conclusion, he said that a global agreement on predictable and equitable burden-sharing was urgently needed to resolve the current problems. The international community must respect the rule of law and acknowledge the positive contributions of refugees to societies. The current situation should not be perceived as a "crisis" but as an opportunity and a call for action.

15. **Mr. Medina Jimenez** (Dominican Republic), speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), expressed solidarity with the victims of the Syrian conflict and with Syria's neighbouring host countries. Several GRULAC countries had put forward proposals to assist persons affected by that conflict, such as facilitating the provision of humanitarian visas through resettlement programmes and lending support to operations designed to help persons of concern. The adoption of the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action in 2014 in Brasilia, had confirmed a commitment on the part of GRULAC countries to maintain the highest protection standards, implement innovative solutions for refugees and displaced persons and put an end to statelessness.

16. GRULAC governments were currently evaluating new strategies on local integration, resettlement, voluntary repatriation and regional mobility for workers, while ensuring the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons. She stressed the need for a strong commitment on the part of all States in resolving the crisis. For its part, the GRULAC governments were determined to provide a humane response to the needs of the most vulnerable groups of refugees.

17. **Ms. Pollack** (United States of America) said that four aspects of humanitarian action were of particular importance, namely providing robust humanitarian assistance to those in need in Syria and to refugees in countries of first asylum, while at the same time addressing the long-term development needs of host communities; secondly, recognizing the terrible toll the war had had on civilians and humanitarian agencies in

conflicts around the globe and the increasing erosion of humanitarian space; thirdly, ensuring collaboration and burden-sharing; and lastly, placing protection at the heart of humanitarian efforts.

18. She stressed the need to allow humanitarian organizations to do their work and to ensure that civilians were protected. Her Government remained committed to assisting those affected by the war in Syria. All donors should make generous commitments commensurate with the magnitude of the crisis and the international community must redouble its efforts to find political solutions to conflicts around the world, as well as to situations of protracted displacement.

19. **Ms. Lindblad** (Sweden) called on the international community to show solidarity and share responsibility with host countries. The Common European Asylum System must be efficient in all respects. There was an urgent need for more resettlement places, and while European Union governments had agreed on 22,000 resettlement places, needs were far greater. Resettlement commitments must be increased in the European Union and by States worldwide.

20. Her Government strongly supported the UNHCR decision to make child protection and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence its key protection priorities. Sweden was one of the countries with the largest number of asylum seekers per capita in the world. In 2014, Sweden had received 81,300 asylum applications, 30,000 of which had been from Syrians. Almost 70,000 new asylum applicants had already been registered in 2015, with the total number expected to reach 100,000 by the end of the year. She stressed the need for the international community to do much more to help people in need of protection.

21. **Ms. Andersen** (Norway) stressed the need to find political solutions to ongoing conflicts and to tackle the root causes of those conflicts. Her Government was particularly concerned about the situation of children, adolescent girls and women in conflict situations, especially the failure to provide children and adolescents with education. Norway made every effort to promote education for refugee children and youth, in particular in a context of armed conflict, including by investing in relevant programmes and by endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration. Her Government strongly believed that protection of refugees was the responsibility of States. Limited resources must be used to help those who were in need of international protection and host countries must have efficient return systems for persons deemed not to be in need of such protection.

22. **Ms. Burgess** (Canada) called for renewed efforts to address the root causes of conflicts and displacement. The protection of women, children and young people against violence and exploitation remained a priority for Canada. Efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence should be redoubled. She called on UNHCR and its partners to continue working closely with host countries in that regard. She stressed the importance of promoting the self-reliance of refugees and said that community-based protection activities could reduce xenophobia, encourage social cohesion and contribute to a better protection environment. Governments must take action to enable effective cooperation between humanitarian and development actors, on the basis of the needs of refugees. Donor governments should invest in durable solutions that supported refugees' own resilience and self-reliance.

23. **Mr. Moreno** (Colombia) said that the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, scheduled for December 2015, should not focus exclusively on the current refugee crises but should also consider the situation of the millions of internally displaced persons around the world. The Colombian delegation welcomed the fact that the rule of law was the theme of the current Note on International Protection (ED/66/SC/CRP.10), in particular since his country's experience had

confirmed the importance of a legal framework to assist victims, especially the 6.4 million victims of forced internal displacement in Colombia. The lessons learned by Colombia in implementing a three-year pilot programme that was being carried out in 17 municipalities with the aim of finding solutions for displaced communities — as part of the UNHCR Transitional Solutions Initiative — should be analysed and systematized for the benefit of other countries.

24. **Mr. Thongphakdi** (Thailand) said that Thailand welcomed the positive developments in Myanmar, including the prospects for signing a nationwide ceasefire agreement that would pave the way for the return of the displaced populations of Myanmar in Thailand. And although Thailand would continue to provide assistance to those persons, it had also started to prepare them with job skills for their return to Myanmar. Thailand hoped that UNHCR and other international partners would support it in those efforts. In recent years, a large number of undocumented migrants had entered Thailand, hoping to be resettled to third countries. The phenomenon presented a challenge to national security and law and order, confirming the Government's view that it was necessary to distinguish economic migrants from those with a genuine need for international protection. Thailand continued to seek durable solutions to that challenge and had explored the use of a bail system that was provided for under its internal law, as an alternative to immigration detention. Along those lines, it encouraged UNHCR to continue sharing best practices and lessons learned on such alternatives. It also encouraged UNHCR to explore ways of expediting the resettlement process in order to ensure that those concerned could avoid long waiting periods in transit countries.

25. **Mr. Reynes** (France) said that protection afforded to persons of concern to UNHCR in emergency situations helped to limit the humanitarian consequences of those situations and to prepare stabilization measures. In prolonged crises, protection served as a tool for finding durable solutions. The distinguishing feature of the right to protection of refugees, notably with regard to the principle of non-refoulement, was the fact that persons who had been subjected to forced displacement were particularly vulnerable, especially while in transit. They were not only more exposed to violence — especially sexual or gender-based violence — but were also more vulnerable targets of transnational organized crime. In order to prevent future violations of refugees' rights, perpetrators must be brought to justice, even if it was before a transitional justice mechanism. The efforts of UNHCR in enhancing international protection were in line with the values held by France, especially those relating to the provision of special care for women and children.

26. **Ms. O'Donnell** (Australia) said that her country wished to encourage the international community to consider flexible, multifaceted and differentiated responses to displacement and mixed migration. Australia believed in the value of migration and supported the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals, one of which called for States to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people. Increasing the number of pathways for orderly lawful movement, including for the purposes of work, study and family reunion, provided alternatives to smuggling, trafficking and dangerous journeys by land and sea, and above all, it provided hope. Australia encouraged all States to develop such migration programmes.

27. **Mr. Kherrour** (Algeria) said that every State's humanitarian efforts must continue to be guided by an integrated approach that took into account the root causes of displacement, the centrality of protection for affected persons and the promotion of durable solutions. His Government was concerned at States' attitude to voluntary repatriation, as it considered the latter to be the best way to protect refugees and reduce the humanitarian burden on host countries. Without the opportunity for

voluntary repatriation, host countries and communities continued to receive large numbers of refugees, sometimes for prolonged periods of time. Special attention should be given to refugees who favoured durable solutions, especially solutions involving voluntary return in dignity and security. Forcibly displaced persons had already suffered enough injustice and should not have to suffer the injustice of inertia or, even worse, abandonment by the international community.

28. **Mr. El Mkhantar** (Morocco) said that the success of humanitarian action depended on the level of commitment and cooperation shown by host countries, which bore prime responsibility for protecting their populations. Morocco believed that refugees should be granted access to basic services and to the labour market, as well as freedom of movement. His delegation supported the commitment of UNHCR to expanding its biometric identity management system in host countries, with a view to establishing a standard global system. It noted with satisfaction the recommendation of the United Nations Board of Auditors concerning the need to register refugees, as a measure to combat the misappropriation of humanitarian aid. The latter was a grave violation of human rights, and persons who committed it should be prosecuted and punished.

29. **Mr. Win** (Observer for Myanmar) said that the democratic reforms undertaken in Myanmar in 2011 had improved economic conditions and narrowed differences between the Government and non-State armed groups, and a nationwide ceasefire agreement was expected to be concluded in the near future. As soon as peace and stability had been restored in former areas of insurgency, the Government would welcome the return of refugees from Myanmar currently living in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. The project in Rakhine State on nationality verification and the issuance of national identity cards was one of the ongoing measures taken by the Government in order to combat statelessness. Through inter-faith dialogue, it had managed not only to prevent new violence in that state but also to promote a culture of peace.

30. **Mr. Mirza** (Observer for Asylum Access), speaking on behalf of a wide range of NGOs, said that the NGO community applauded the choice of the rule of law as the organizing theme of the most recent Note on International Protection (EC/66/SC/CRP.10). The rule of law applied not only to the emergencies dealt with by UNHCR, but also to the Office's own operations and governance; it required States to move away from policies that restricted access to asylum, limited freedom of movement or placed refugees at risk of refoulement. Regional initiatives to codify, define and reaffirm commitments to the rule of law should be encouraged and supported. Above all, the NGO community called on Governments to fulfill their obligation to provide protection to refugees and stateless persons, and to prevent and solve cases of statelessness.

31. In the specific situation of the Syrian Arab Republic, a global comprehensive plan of action was needed, as the natural next step to the call by UNHCR for international responsibility sharing. With regard to the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea boat crisis, the NGO community urged Governments to start implementing the recommendations made at the May 2015 International Organization for Migration (IOM) Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean, including the immediate provision of assistance and protection to refugees and migrants at sea.

32. With regard to the Americas, the NGO community was concerned at reports that the Mexican Government had apprehended and deported more than 90,000 Central American migrants between October 2014 and April 2015. Instead of apprehending and deporting migrants, attention should be paid to developing a safe asylum space in Mexico. The NGO community strongly condemned the use of arbitrary and prolonged

immigration detention and urged the Government of the United States to stop the practice of placing immigrants in family detention centres.

33. Regarding the situation in Australia, the NGO community was disturbed by the deterioration of protection standards for asylum seekers; it urged the Australian Government to abandon its current policies and to work more constructively with its neighbours to raise standards of protection and provide durable solutions for refugees in Asia. As to the situation in Kenya, the NGO community wished to recall that all refugee returns to Somalia must be voluntary, dignified and in full conformity with international law. It cautioned that the current Kenyan return strategy must take into account the return environment and reception capabilities in South Somalia, returns from Yemen and the continued presence of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

34. The NGO community wished to express strong support for the UNHCR campaign to eradicate statelessness globally and noted the increasing attention being paid to that issue by the United Nations Human Rights Council and the United Nations human rights treaty bodies. It urged Executive Committee members States to utilize the Universal Periodic Review process to further address statelessness. At the regional level, it wished to draw attention to the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action and the Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on Eradication of Statelessness, as examples of regional initiatives that complemented the global campaign to end statelessness.

35. **Mr. Türk** (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection), responding to comments by delegations, said that he welcomed the progress made by Thailand in its efforts to identify alternatives to the detention of asylum seekers. He thanked Norway for its reminder of the Safe Schools Declaration, whose aim was to protect schools and universities from attack during armed conflicts, and the United States for its reminder that consideration should be given to the particular needs of refugee hosting communities and to promoting stronger development engagement. He welcomed the emphasis placed by Colombia on the needs of IDPs, noting that he regarded its experience in that regard as an example of best practice. On the subject of durable solutions, Canada had stressed the importance of the incorporation upstream in emergency responses of a solutions orientation, not only downstream at the end of the displacement cycle. Australia had stressed the importance of exploring legal alternatives; in that connection, he wished to draw attention to the humanitarian visa programme, which had been successfully launched by Brazil, as one such alternative. Both Thailand and Myanmar had stressed the importance of voluntary repatriation; UNHCR fully supported such efforts and stood ready to work with both Governments after the national ceasefire agreement had been signed.

(b) Programme budgets, management, financial control and administrative oversight (A/AC.96/1144; 1146 and Add.1; 1148; and 1151-1153)

36. **Ms. Clements** (Deputy High Commissioner) said that, in its report on the financial statements of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the year ended 31 December 2014 (A/70/5/Add.6), the United Nations Board of Auditors had issued an unqualified opinion that the financial statements presented fairly the financial position of the funds and financial performance and cash flows for the year, in accordance with the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS). The Board had noted that UNHCR had a strong overall financial position at the end of 2014 despite a net deficit for the year of more than $304 million. The total revenue of the Office amounted to $3.06 billion. As compared with 2013, voluntary contributions had decreased by 3.6 per cent. Total expenses were $3.36 billion, representing an increase of 24.3 per cent as compared to the previous year.

37. In the course of its audit, the Board had visited UNHCR field operations in Ethiopia and Uganda and held teleconferences with operations in Jordan and Lebanon. In its report, the Board had issued 21 new recommendations. Uneven donor funding in 2014 had been identified as a major issue by the Board. The Office remained committed, however, to working closely with donors in order to make funding more predictable. The Board had noted some progress made in stewardship and accountability for the use of physical assets but emphasized the need for appropriate data to demonstrate that the global fleet management project was delivering the anticipated benefits.

38. The Board had also noted the lack of a systematic approach to fraud and the low levels of fraud reported. UNHCR would introduce a systematic reporting procedure in order to address the issue. Another key project was the upgrade of the enterprise resource planning system, which the Board considered to be essential for providing management with more reliable and timely information and ensuring that resources were used most effectively. The Office would introduce an additional note to the financial statements in response to the Board's recommendation that UNHCR should do more to disclose funding for overhead costs of international implementing partners. UNHCR had fully implemented 27 of the 40 outstanding recommendations made for 2013 and was making every effort to fulfil the remaining 13.

39. She wished to draw attention to the critical role played by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight (OIOS). The vast majority of its recommendations made in 2014 were already in the process of implementation. UNHCR greatly valued the expert advice that OIOS provided. It remained fully committed to good governance, oversight and a robust risk management system.

40. **Ms. Andersen** (Norway) said that her Government recognized the challenges of managing a needs-based budget and an increasing funding gap. She appreciated the efforts made to ensure effective oversight, including fraud protection and other measures. Such measures should enhance transparency and the effectiveness of responses while avoiding further bureaucratization. The 40 per cent of the budget that went to implementing partners was a welcome development. However, many changes had occurred in recent years with respect to partner arrangements. She urged UNHCR to keep the arrangements with partners lean and functional, as some structures that had been put in place did not seem conducive to timely and principled responses. Her Government would therefore welcome a dialogue with UNHCR and partners in order to clarify expectations and the driving forces behind such changes.

41. **Ms. Pollack** (United States of America) said that while UNHCR was making progress on transparency and accountability, there was much more to be done. It commended UNHCR efforts to shift more resources from Geneva to the field. It was essential for headquarters to continue to ensure consistent quality control and provide adequate technical staff to support operations, especially in the area of resettlement, child protection, education and gender-based violence.

42. Her delegation was concerned about whether an already overstretched staff had the capacity to implement fully the timely recommendations of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC). Incorporating oversight and accountability mechanisms should be the standard for planning any operation. It was important for UNHCR to continue its shift from a resource-driven planning process to one based on performance and results, to make indicators more measurable and less subjective and to improve reporting. Lastly, she trusted that UNHCR would incorporate the recommendations of the Policy Development and Evaluation Service into future programming. Her delegation placed great importance on sound programme management and oversight. The challenge would be to harmonize the need for oversight and controls with the realities of emergencies and operations.

43. **Ms. Jeffrey** (Canada), noting that programming through implementing partners represented 40 per cent of UNHCR expenditures, said that her delegation commended recent efforts made by the Office to forge strategic partnerships and was hopeful that the Enhanced Framework for Implementing with Partners would lead to improved partner selection and clearer communication. It urged UNHCR to provide staff with appropriate training on the Framework and its enterprise risk management approach. Her Government wished to underline the importance of partnerships with donors. As a member of the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), it was aware of challenges faced by UNHCR concerning communication and emphasized the importance of effective assessment and clear communication of its results.

44. **Ms. Criswell** (Observer for World Vision International), speaking on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organizations, said that, as needs would inevitably exceed funds in 2016, World Vision urged UNHCR to have clear road maps in place in order to avoid costly exercises in resetting priorities. It recognized the leadership role played by UNHCR in the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and urged the Office to ensure that education and child protection were made a priority and adequately funded. It called on UNHCR country teams to further engage partners in country operations planning stakeholder meetings. Her delegation also encouraged UNHCR to continue its training and capacity-building efforts with respect to the Enhanced Framework for Implementing with Partners. When scrutinizing partners' administrative costs, the Office should take into account the additional cost burdens that NGOs had to bear under the Framework. Displacement in refugee camps lasted 20 years on average, while NGOs had to meet needs through biannual budgets and one-year funding awards. Her delegation therefore challenged the Executive Committee to make the changes in the UNHCR budget structure to meet the needs of the twenty-first century.

45. **Ms. Clements** (Deputy High Commissioner) said that there had been a number of common themes raised, including strong support for the Office and a concern that oversight did not stand in the way of what it was trying to accomplish with its extensive array of partners on the ground. The Office would be taking up the very constructive comments on the need for a dialogue on partnership made by Canada, Norway and World Vision. UNHCR itself had been trying to focus greater attention on partnership. There were now focal points in the Office who dedicated themselves to the issue. UNHCR was endeavouring to measure results more effectively and to inform members about what it had accomplished and what it could not do well. Turning to budget issues, she said that the Office would like nothing more than to have predictable funding, multi-year arrangements and advance planning. However, it largely operated on the contributions made by donors and often they were made on an annual basis. There had been an effort by UNHCR to try to take decisions far earlier in the year than it had in the past, taking care not to touch contracts and arrangements with partners already in place. It would take a hard look at the point raised by the United States representative as to whether headquarters support was currently too lean in order to support colleagues in the field.

Consideration of reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation

Report on activities of the Inspector General's Office (A/AC.96/1139)

46. **Mr. Kebede** (Inspector General of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the professionalization of the investigatory function within the Inspector General's Office was a development that would have a far-reaching impact on oversight activities of UNHCR. The decision to professionalize

that function was prompted by a recommendation made by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) following its peer review. Another OLAF recommendation was to focus greater attention on external investigations relating to implementing partners. As the mandate of his Office was to ensure that allegations of misconduct of all persons and entities with a contractual link to UNHCR were duly investigated, it was working to strengthen the investigation-related clause in the standard vendor agreement.

47. Progress was being made on the project to strengthen cooperation between UNHCR and NGOs on investigations and the Office had held regional workshops, in Bangkok and Tunis, aimed at building the capacity of NGOs to investigate allegations of misconduct. The NGO investigation specialist roster was another element of this project. The sustainability of the NGO investigation specialist roster depended on the availability of dedicated funds to ensure that investigations were carried out in a timely and professional manner. Turning to the critical subject of resources, he said that one of the main challenges facing his Office was that human and financial capacity had fallen short of the significant increases in UNHCR programmes. His Office was currently actively engaged in the process of identifying an entity to undertake an independent evaluation of the inspection function, as recommended by the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee. In addition to carrying out inspections of UNHCR operations around the world, the Inspection Service had conducted two joint missions with the World Food Programme (WFP), in Mauritania and Kenya, in 2015. The joint mission report was available on both WFP and UNHCR websites.

48. **Mr. El Mkhantar** (Morocco) said he welcomed the signing of the memorandum of understanding with the OIOS. He noted, however, that internal audit would be the responsibility of OIOS rather than brought in-house, as had been recommended by the Board of Auditors. There had also been a recommendation that an evaluation of the Inspector General's Office should be conducted by an independent body rather than as a peer review, which would also help to clarify the role of the inspection body and distinguish it from the internal audit services. What was the Inspector General's Office doing to implement that and other recommendations?

49. **Ms. Lindblad** (Sweden) said that Sweden, as a large donor of unearmarked funding, welcomed the increased resources and greater level of professionalization of the Inspector General's Office, as well as the increased number of OIOS staff dedicated to UNHCR. She called for continued consultation between the offices concerned to avoid overlap and take advantage of synergies.

50. **Mr. Kebede** (Inspector General) said that, pursuant to the memorandum of understanding signed with OIOS, internal audit within UNHCR was performed by that body. The two offices cooperated closely and had begun to carry out joint audits and inspections. The Independent Audit and Oversight Committee had recommended that a peer review of the inspection service be conducted, and he had asked Member States who had such capacity to propose their services. To prevent overlap between the work of the inspection and audit services and to ensure complementarity, joint risk assessments had been made in respect of each audit to be conducted by OIOS in 2016 and discussions had been held with each operation concerned.

51. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner) recalled that Mr. Kebede, who was due to retire the same day that he himself would be leaving the organization, had served UNHCR for many years with great dedication and efficiency, and represented the spirit and passion of the organization better than anyone else.

Report on policy development and evaluation (A/AC.96/1150)

52. **Mr. Macleod** (Policy Development and Evaluation Service) said that the overall aim of the revised evaluation policy was the preparation of a global work plan for evaluation, including commitments and resource allocations, which was a complex and time-consuming task because of the Office's broad mandate, field presence and variety of operations. Greater responsibility for evaluation would be devolved to headquarters divisions, bureaux and field operations, with an appropriate division of labour and robust quality assurance measures.

53. His Service focused on evaluating matters of strategic consequence to UNHCR, providing technical support and guidance and delivering quality assurance and oversight. A multi-country evaluation of the organization's protection work in education, child protection and sexual and gender-based violence would soon be commissioned in order to develop a methodology for assessing the incorporation of protection across sectors and its outcomes.

54. An overall review of work on refugee status determination, together with an in-depth evaluation of the situation in Kenya, had helped produce a standard tool that could be used in the field to plan and monitor responsible transitions to national asylum systems. An evaluation of the Delivering as One initiative had produced useful insights into ways of engaging with broader development initiatives and the need to respond to the challenge of multi-year planning and budgeting. Country programme evaluations were particularly challenging because of the huge differences between programmes, which made it difficult to apply standard methodologies. The Service was piloting an approach that could be applied to several countries facing similar challenges that had comparable policy, institutional and operating environments and programme components.

55. The intention was not to establish a larger centralized service, but rather to extend evaluation practice across the organization. The function would be further professionalized through staffing, learning programmes and investment in specialized training, and co-financing arrangements would be sought to bridge the gap before resources were allocated systematically to evaluation work throughout the organization. The Service had already begun to draw on international best practice to establish a knowledge infrastructure, with terms of reference developed against a standard checklist and a management response matrix to be published along with reports. To complete the quality assurance system, guidance was needed to ensure that there was enough credible data to justify evaluations, and refugees and persons of concern needed to be included in the process. New methodologies and technology could be used to ensure that their opinions and insights were captured and fed into the evaluation design and planning.

56. Recognizing the value of partnerships, the Service would continue to work with the United Nations Evaluation Group and the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation group. The evaluation by OIOS of the UNHCR approach to durable solutions had produced some useful insights. The Service had also participated in a comprehensive and groundbreaking study of refugee poverty and welfare in Jordan and Lebanon, which it was hoped would contribute to more systematic and practical research on the economic and other consequences of marginalizing refugee populations.

57. **Ms. Bakels** (Netherlands) said that the Netherlands welcomed what had been done to improve the evaluation function but considered that more was still needed, especially in respect of quality funding and independence.

58. **Mr. El Mkhantar** (Morocco), noting that there had been a recommendation from the Independent Oversight and Audit Committee, echoed by OIOS, that the Service

should be split to allow it to focus on evaluation and not be involved in policy development and analysis, asked why that had not been done.

59. **Mr. Macleod** (Policy Development and Evaluation Service) said that UNHCR was aiming for an increase in funding for the whole organization, not only his Service. Resources were already devoted to evaluation in field operations and that development would be tracked carefully in the future. Although the Service had not officially been split, in practice, policy development took place throughout the organization, while the Service itself focused primarily on evaluation work.

Consideration and adoption of the biennial programme budget 2016-2017

60. **Ms. Clements** (Deputy High Commissioner) said that, faced with the enormous challenges that the High Commissioner had highlighted in his opening remarks, UNHCR was seeing its efforts undermined by the biggest funding gap in its history and its resources stretched to the limit by simultaneous crises, whereby 40 per cent of the people it served were in countries affected by emergency situations. However, it could not forget the persons in protracted, rather than crisis, situations, even if the media did not publish their stories.

61. At the end of June 2015, the comprehensive UNHCR budget had stood at over $7 billion, of which $1 billion was allocated to supplementary budgets for the situations in Burundi, Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan, Ukraine, Yemen and North Waziristan, as well as the Bay of Bengal emergency and the Ebola response. Since then, a further supplementary budget had been established for the emergency response to the Mediterranean situation and adjustments had been made to the budgets for Burundi and Syria. However, the funding available for 2015 fell far short of meeting the Office's needs. The High Commissioner had implemented cost-saving measures to provide some flexibility and accommodate the increased earmarking of contributions. Nevertheless, the situation was having serious repercussions, notably in Africa, with funding gaps of 83 per cent affecting Central African refugees and 72 per cent for those in South Sudan, while some Yemeni and Somali refugees in Ethiopia would be receiving no assistance at all and children in Niger and Burkina Faso would be denied access to elementary school.

62. The organization was exploring all possible funding opportunities, notably emerging donors and the private sector, the latter having responded amazingly to the Europe refugee crisis. A paper to be made available after the meeting addressed the proposed revision to the overhead support charge policy, and an informal consultative meeting would be held in the coming weeks.

63. As in the past, the 2016-2017 budgetary requirements had been drafted not on the basis of resource availability, but rather by using a global needs assessment that took particular account of implementation capacity. The annual programme review, on which the requirements were based, had been carried out in May 2015 and therefore did not take account of more recent situations that had arisen in Yemen, Burundi, the Mediterranean and the Bay of Bengal. The proposal of $6.5 billion for 2016 represented an increase of $312 million over the revised 2015 budget, with the $6.4 billion for 2017 a subsequent reduction of 2 per cent. Operations in Africa would account for 35 per cent of the 2016 budget, those in the Middle East and North Africa 31 per cent, Asia, the Pacific and Europe 8 per cent and the Americas 2 per cent. The share for global programmes would rise to 5 per cent and that for headquarters would remain at 3 per cent. Of the four pillars, the Global Refugee Programme would account for around $5 billion, statelessness-related activities for $57 million, reintegration for $264 million in 2016 and $257 million in 2017 and activities and programmes relating to internally displaced persons $1.2 billion in 2016 and $1.1 billion in 2017.

64. It was noteworthy that there had been a consistent increase in implementation rates since 2010, even in the context of growing needs and scarce resources. Furthermore, between 2006 and 2014, expenditure on staff had risen by only 56 per cent in dollar terms compared to a 200 per cent rise in total expenditure. That fall as a percentage of total expenditure from 41 per cent to 21 per cent could be attributed to the efforts of the High Commissioner and the increase in the rate of implementation carried out through partners to 40 per cent in 2014.

65. In the forthcoming biennium, UNHCR would continue to enhance emergency coordination, preparedness and response, upgrade the enterprise resource planning system, broaden its donor base and place priority on the delivery of cash-based interventions. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had been particularly supportive of its efforts to strengthen budget formulation, implementation and results, but had noted the trend towards earmarked donations, which made it more difficult to deploy resources flexibly to meet demand. Donors were called on to increase their non-earmarked contributions.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.